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ABSTRACT

Observations on teacher education are offered from the point of view of a parent of a learning disabled child who is also supervisor of student teachers in elementary and special education. Implications of a movement which advocates phasing out traditional 4-year undergraduate teacher education academic programs and substituting graduate programs are noted. Also cited are the discouragingly small percentages of minority students in teacher preparation programs and the need for decisive action in terms of bilingual education. Resistance to including cultural pluralism in teacher education programs is noted as well. Difficulties produced by inconsistent interpretations of mainstreaming are reviewed. The paper concludes with a plea for a spirit of shared responsibility among parents, regular education teachers, and special education teachers. (CL)

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WHAT IS OCCURRING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE TRAINING OF EDUCATORS WHO TEACH THE HANDICAPPED POPULATION?

A Response to the "Training of Parents of Exceptional Children" TOPEC Project Directors

The Pennsylvania Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (PACLD), a non-profit organization of parents and professionals that assist in attaining appropriate human service programs for the disabled citizens in the state, recognized the dire need to educate parents of handicapped children about establishing reasonable IEP goals for their children. Under the leadership of PACLD's Executive Director, Mary Rita Hanley, and with the support of the PACLD Professional Advisory Committee and other interested people, Mrs. Hanley submitted the Training of Parents of Exceptional Children (hereafter identified as the TOPEC project) grant proposal for funds to be provided by the U. S. Department of Education "Training Personnel for the Education of the Handicapped" (CFDA 84.029) discretionary grant program. The TOPEC grant proposal was funded and specific goals (i.e., the development of the instructional materials and conducting training sessions throughout the state) were implemented.

At today's International Association of Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities Conference seminar the "Training of Parents of Exceptional Children (TOPEC): A Handbook for Parents" and portions of the

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Presentation made at The Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities International Conference, New York City, New York, March 12-15, 1986.

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two developed video tape cassettes will be viewed. Topics to be discussed by the seminar panel speakers will be on how the TOPEC project began, its time frame regarding the accomplishment of the goals, the key elements contained in the parent training material information on the population trained through the TOPEC project, and an overview of what is occurring in higher education that is affecting the training of the educators who teach the handicapped population.

As a parent of a learning disabled child, and as a teacher of "normal" and exceptional students, I am pleased that the TOPEC project exists. Basic knowledge about the exceptional students' educational needs, assessing and evaluating information, and an understanding about the legal rights provided by Congress under Public Law 94-142 (Education of Handicapped Children's Act) benefits not only the handicapped child, but his/her family and also other individuals responsible for his/her attainment of optimum performance.

As a supervisor of student teachers in elementary education and in special education (K-12) at Millersville University, Millersville, Pennsylvania, I intend to assist the pre-service teachers in developing competencies related to mainstreaming handicapped students. I have observed that, in certain situations, it would appear, at times, that the mainstreaming flow is stagnated, and/or is flowing in the reverse direction. Recognizing for whom, when, why and what is occurring in the mainstreaming program, plus assessing if the mainstreaming program is or is not working for the handicapped student, requires much talent, knowledge, courage and honesty by <u>all</u> people involved in the mainstreaming process.

Need I tell you, students, parents, teachers and administrators here today, that the reality of obtaining a successful and purposely mainstreamed program for the handicapped is still a dream for far too many of our students?

There are a number of concerns I have regarding the "perceived" and/or actual responsibilities "placed" and/or dictated to the teacher training institutions in our country. Along with the public's criticism of what's wrong with the nation's educational systems, a consortium of education deans from some of the nation's research universities is gathering momentum and exercising intellectual muscle in an attempt to make sweeping changes in the field of teacher education. This self-monitoring organization, The Holmes Group, under the direction of Judith E. Lanier, dean of the college of education at Michigan State University, advocates phasing out the traditional four-year undergraduate teacher education academic programs and instead establishing only graduate programs. The Holmes proposal appears to focus on developing and administering a series of teacher exams which would be used in determing who would be eligible for entry into the teaching profession; furthermore, "sorting" teachers into three differentiated structure levels, would no doubt also determine the teachers' salary levels. A drive to increase the number of minorities in the nation's teacher-education programs is another goal of the Holmes project.

The goal of increasing the number of minorities in the teacher education programs is a noteworthy one; however, time will reveal how soon, if ever, this goal is attained. Research from across the nation (Matlock, 1985;

Roth, 1985; Anrig, 1986; and Kanchak, 1984) confirm that few minority applicants are entering the teacher education field. Richburg (1985) identifies many "screens" that inhibit the minorities from entering and/or completing a teacher training program (i.e., competency tests, certification tests, university entrance and exit requirements). According to the Educational Testing Service (ETS) research reports, the percentage of minorities in the teaching force by the year 2000 will drop dramatically, while the minority population increases. Callan (1985) reports that minorities attending California's K-12 school programs will increase from 27% in 1970 (and 42% in 1980) to 52 percent. This pattern of statistics is also duplicated elsewhere across the country.

Not to be neglected are the 420,000 limited-English proficient (LEP) handicapped students scattered throughout the nation. This population, found in large metropolitan cities, small towns, and rural areas, also is in need of qualified teachers (Baca and Bransford, 1981). Higher education is still struggling with this aspect of teacher training as well. Information, especially pertaining to identifying teacher education quality indicators (Sutherland and Castleberry, 1985) and listing what the states and Washington, D.C. are doing regarding (1) established bilingual special education certification, (2) required both oral and written proficiency in English for the bilingual certification, and (3) provided inservice on bilingual Special Education (Salend and Fradd, 1985), seems to indicate that a bipolar condition exists when attempting to tie together what we know about the needed teaching competencies and the reality of the functioning world.

Another existing problem is that many future teachers are not interested in taking courses dealing with multicultural topics nor in participating in multicultural preparatory experiences (Mahan and Boyle, 1981). In spite of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) supporting the inclusion of cultural pluralism into the teacher education programs, there appears to be a resistance to what was designed to create positive progress. The future teachers who are needed to teach the 7,800,000 school-aged population currently having difficulty progressing in the public schools, are simply not coming forward.

In many states the majority of handicapped students are "mainstreamed." The Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services for the U. S. Department of Education, Madeleine C. Will, summarizes what she and many other citizens see occurring:

> "Students need to be 'pulled-out' into special settings where they can receive remedial services. Although well-intentioned, this so-called 'pull-out' approach to the educational difficulties of students with learning problems has failed in many instances to meet the educational needs of these students and has created, however unwittingly, barriers to their successful education." (Will, 1986, page 412.)

While the nation supported the ideals represented in Public Law 94-142, the states have overlooked requirements of that law related to special education personnel preparation and teacher certification (Heller,

1983). No clear national pattern regarding teacher certification appears to be on the horizon. With the trend to mainstream "anyone, anywhere, at any time" (which exists in too many situations for entirely too many ill-prepared handicapped students "dumped into the deep, rushing and crowded stream), there is a dire need to share the educational responsibilities among regular and special education teachers. It is evident that there is a movement in the nation to re-examine regular and special education certification standards. According to Chapey, Pyszkowski, and Trimarco's (1985) data, fifteen states (30%) currently require regular education teachers to complete one course in special education and five states (10%) require two courses in special education for the certification of regular teachers.

Efforts to develop and to strengthen all teachers' professional competencies are occurring. I am delighted that the TOPEC project includes working with school personnel and parents of handicapped children. In my capacity as a trainer of teachers, I would like to see the TOPEC manual and tape cassettes being utilized in the universities' classrooms across the nation. Future teachers as well as parents of handicapped children would benefit from observing, learning, and practicing what is conveyed through the TOPEC training materials. The spirit of shared responsibilities will advance our service to each other. The following statement by Will reinforces the goal of the TOPEC project:

> "I strongly believe that in any experimental efforts, parents should be deeply involved and their rights to due process and participation in planning should be assured, especially in

matters relating to the child's individualized education plan."

(Will, 1986, p. 414)

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